

Lt. Governor Hall-Long & Former U.S Rep. Patrick Kennedy lead a Discussion on Social and Emotional Behavioral Health

Innovation Center, William Penn High School. – On Tuesday, Lt. Governor Hall-Long joined Patrick and Amy Kennedy and leaders in behavioral health from around Delaware for a round table discussion aimed at improving student mental health. Patrick Kennedy is one of the world's leading voices on mental health and addiction. He is best known as the lead sponsor of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, which was signed into law by President George W. Bush. Amy Kennedy has over 15 years of experience working in public schools. She has seen firsthand how a child's mental health can impact their ability to learn and grow. Her experiences have shaped her advocacy efforts around social-emotional learning and mental wellness for children and adolescents.

“Too many children suffer in silence due to the stinging stigma our culture has placed on mental health. As a result, kids and families do not get the help that they need. For their future and for their wellbeing we can no longer afford to fail to provide support and resources for kids who are battling mental illness. Our schools and communities can be a safe haven and conduit for help, and I am committed that we as a state provide the resources to achieve this goal,” said **Lt. Governor Bethany Hall-Long.**

Highlighted in the discussion was the topic of how increased investment, at the federal, community, and state-level in mental health services for young people from elementary school

through college is critical to the overall emotional health of students.

“For far too long, we’ve neglected to acknowledge mental health as an essential health,” said **former U.S. Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy, founder of The Kennedy Forum**. “And we’ve watched rates of overdoses and suicides soar to historic levels—even before the pandemic. The only way to truly confront the gravity of this crisis is to empower our youth with the mental health literacy and cognitive skills they need to face life’s challenges head-on. We have to walk the walk for prevention.”

Even before the pandemic hit, many students, here in Delaware and around the country, were suffering from mental health conditions, which are only compounded for those who experience trauma from racial disparities, poverty, food insecurity, abuse, and more. I am inspired by the commitment Governor Carney and Lt. Governor Hall-Long are making to ensuring that Delaware’s youth have access to the mental health supports and services they need,” said **Amy Kennedy, Education Director of The Kennedy Forum**. “We cannot allow the mental health of our youth to become a secondary priority. Investing in behavioral health programs, social emotional learning, suicide prevention efforts, and other mental health services will give our young people the tools they need to succeed in school and throughout their lives.”

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. SEL can improve student academic performance, well-being, and lifelong skills, while decreasing students’ anxiety, behavior problems, and substance use.

In addition to Secretary of Education Susan Bunting, members from the Department of Education outlined how funds from the American Rescue Plan will be utilized to support social emotional learning, multi-tiered systems of support, and increase access to behavioral health services for all students in order to help implement and ensure equitable education for a stronger and healthier Delaware.

“Our educators, school counselors and school staff members know first-hand how important this work is. They see how what is happening in our communities affects our students and know that our children need their emotional and mental health needs met to be able to focus on academic content. I’m grateful for the support of public and private partners who recognize this and are collaborating to provide these supports and to raise awareness, so these needs always remain in the forefront of our policies, programming and resource allocation,” said **Secretary Susan Bunting**.

“We know that meaningful, positive connections can make all the difference in a child’s life. Together, we can foster those connections and support the behavioral health and social emotional learning of children and youth across Delaware. By investing in our children’s well-being, we invest in Delaware’s future,” said **Josette Manning, Cabinet Secretary of the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families**. “I want to thank Lt. Governor Bethany Hall-Long for her leadership and passion on this topic, and applaud our stakeholders in the Department of Education and former U.S. Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy and Amy Kennedy for their continued advocacy. Discussions such as these elevate child and family well-being and promote innovation and collaboration.”

There were several other speakers throughout the day with impressive experiences and backgrounds in behavioral health including Pro Tempore Sen. David Sokola, Sen. Nicole Poore, Sen. Sarah McBride, Sen. Marie Pinkney, Rep. Kendra Johnson and Rep. Melissa Minor-Brown; Dr. Jeffrey Menzer

(Superintendent of Colonial School District), Jon Cooper (Director of Behavioral Health for Colonial School District), Forrest Watson III and Norwood Coleman (Life Health Center), Khayree Bey (Colonial School District's 2021 Teacher of the Year and a Lt. Governor's Challenge 2020 winner), the DOE team (Christine Alois, Susan Haberstroh, Michael Rodriguez and Teri Lawler), and DSCYF Secretary Josette Manning.

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Useful links can be found here:

- Livestream of the Roundtable: <https://fb.watch/6KX9G3AkPh/>
- www.casel.org
- <https://www.nj.gov/education/njtss/>
- <https://www.nj.gov/education/ESSA/guidance/njdoe/UnlockingYourFederalFunds.pdf>
- https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/05%20P2_Providing%20Scl-Based%20MH%20Svs%20FINAL.pdf
- https://www.jedfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/The-Comprehensive-Approach-to-Mental-Health-Promotion-and-Suicide-Prevention-for-High-Schools_JED.pdf
- <https://mhanys.org/programs/schools/>
- <https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/sos-signs-suicide>
- <https://www.mindwise.org/suicide-prevention/>
- <https://www.utsouthwestern.edu/education/medical-school/departments/psychiatry/research/center/youth-aware-mental-health.html>
- <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/preventing-suicide/how-can-you-help/trevor-care-training/>